

## **A Failed Politician Judges 15: 1- 20**

Friends, if you get to know me a little bit you'll soon discover that I'm a big fan of action movies like Lord of the Rings, Pirates of the Caribbean, Iron Man – and confess I also saw Cowboys and Aliens this past summer too.

And in my opinion the story of Samson would make a great action movie! It's got all the right ingredients for it. An underdog hero with special rules for his life, a ruthless enemy to fight against, beautiful women – (*before there were Bond Girls, there were Samson Girls*) and of course lots of action, especially in this third chapter we just saw...

But if Samson was made into a movie would it just be another action flick – full of slow-mo battle scenes showing Samson effortlessly turning aside the spears and swords of the Philistine, his muscles bulging, his long hair is flying about, expertly delivering killing blows with nothing but the jawbone of a donkey...

Would it be just another action flick featuring gratuitous violence – or would there something more to it?

Well friends, we expect that there would be something more to this story because it comes to us from the scriptures, and as 2 Tim 3:15-17 says “ *the Holy Scriptures....are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” And that “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”

So, what are we to get out of the story of Samson beyond being impressed by his superhuman exploits? Well... let's start by looking at what goes wrong in this chapter.

It starts when Samson decides that he's going to go back down to Timnah to be with his wife. So, Samson brings a goat – perhaps this was the Philistine equivalent to chocolate and flowers – and goes down as if nothing had happened to romance the woman he thinks is his wife.

But of course something had happened; Samson had stormed off from the wedding and left his bride behind, so her father figured that Samson didn't want her anymore and so he had given her to the best man instead.

Of course all this takes place within the larger context that the nation of Israel was being oppressed by the Philistines because they were not being faithful covenant partners with God.

So when Samson discovers his wife has been given away to another he is insulted and angry and he plots his revenge which will start an escalating blood-feud between himself and the Philistines.

Now they say revenge is a dish best served cold, but Samson decides to BBQ it instead and sets fire to the Philistines crops. This delivers a crushing blow to their economic and agricultural production - sort of like the hero of an action movie striking back at a drug cartel by burning their coca fields and production facilities...the Philistine's strength to oppress Israel will be considerably weakened by having their food and economic resources destroyed.

*Now before you get all worried about animal cruelty, the number three hundred is more of a literary expression as we would say – “a million” meaning a large group, and Samson was using an animal that was already hunted as a pest in the vineyards - Song of Songs 2:14 says that foxes ruin the vineyards and scholarly opinion is that they would eat the grapes off the vines. Jackals were basically common vermin.*

In retaliation, the Philistines do what any self-respecting group of villains do – they kill the people who are connected to Samson – not his parents, but the woman he loved and her father.

And just like in the action movies – when the bad guys mess with the one the hero loves, watch out! All hell is about to break loose – and the text says Samson attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them.

So with Samson standing up to the Philistines and taking apart their operation left right and center you would think that it would inspire his fellow Israelites to rise up and attack them as well, since it's evident they have been weakened.

You would think so... but in fact what we see happen is that the locals come to Samson and say “Hombre, are you loco???” You can’t do this to the Philistines, they will make trouble for us and we don’t want no trouble”

Samson’s fellow Israelites are so intimidated by the Philistines they would rather hand over one of their own than stand up to them and take advantage of what God has started so they can be obedient to conquer all of the Promised Land.

And so this chapter closes with a disheartening sentence – It says for twenty years Samson judged Israel... in the days of the Philistines.

So in spite of the fact that Samson kills a thousand Philistines soldiers in front of three thousand of his countrymen – his heroic actions empowered by the Spirit of the LORD never seem to rouse the nation of Israel from their apathy about being oppressed by the Philistines,

So they continue to rule over Israel for another twenty years. Samson will remain nothing more than a vigilante – a failed politician.

And friends, this situation is similar to how we, as God’s people, are so often content to live our lives co-existing with the Sin, that is oppressing us.

Perhaps we see this most overtly when there is some form of abuse, which is Sin, in a relationship and the abused person puts up with it and stays with the abuser.

But I suspect that for most of us this is a reality in our lives that has to do with what we might call “our guilty little pleasures.” You know those things which we know are wrong but we do anyway...things that we call our “character flaws” or “bad habits.”

Like watching movies which glorify casual sex and violence,  
Like participating in the neighborhood gossip,  
Like stretching the truth or telling white lies,  
Like venting our rage by flipping the middle finger at the driver who cut us off,

Like giving into the temptation to believe that it’s up to us to decide what’s right and wrong and how we should live.

Like believing the lies that say we are worthless, that we're not enough, that we need to work harder in order to impress people...

You see friends we can become so familiar with having Sin oppress us that we just get used to it and we put up with it...

even though we may know all about Jesus and who He was,

even though we may have learned that He taught us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul and mind and strength,

even though Jesus demonstrated how to love our neighbor as ourselves...

even though he performed miracles – turning water to wine, feeding four thousand, calming a storm, and casting out demons

And in spite of celebrating his sacrifice for our sin and his resurrection over death each year at Easter...

We remain comfortable with Sin in our lives, and we put up with its oppression. It's a lot like Samson and the nation of Israel isn't it?

But friends as I've said before, the stories in the bible are written to reveal the true nature of God to us. Because no matter what goes wrong in the story, the good news is that God always comes in to save the day.

And from the start of this story God has been working behind the scenes to set-up a confrontation between Samson and the Philistines to demonstrate his power and to show how their gods are powerless, so He can save Israel from them – and from their own apathy.

So When the men of Judah fail to rally behind Samson, the Spirit of the LORD takes over and through Samson - God himself is fighting the Philistine army, and the battle is a study in contrasts: one man versus a thousand or more, long hair versus clean shaven, a primitive bone club versus forged iron swords and spears.

Because this is often how God works, as the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:25 *“the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”*

So Samson, one man with a bone club defeats one thousand trained armed soldiers. And when he is finished, exhausted and almost dying from dehydration He cries out to God and God provides water to quench his thirst and restore his strength.

And friends as we learned last week, God’s actions always seem to foreshadow what He will do in the future and again we see indications of what Jesus will be like, as we look at Samson.

For example – in this chapter Samson was hiding out in the cave of Etam, which is only a short distance from the town of Bethlehem, where Jesus was born – in a shelter for animals that scholars believe was built into a cave.

Samson is rejected and betrayed by his countrymen because he is overturning the status quo and standing up to the Philistines,

Jesus is rejected and betrayed by his countrymen because he stands up to the sinful self-righteousness which was oppressing God’s people and claimed to be God’s son – the messiah!

And perhaps the most significant allusion in the story of Samson as to what was coming in the ministry and work of Jesus Christ is how God uses Samson as a new kind of judge, one that doesn’t rely on political skill, military strategy or weapons to free Israel from their oppression.

You see friends in the person of Jesus Christ; God has a new solution to the age old problem of human sinfulness, and it’s not a political solution, it’s not a legal solution, it’s not an economic solution, it’s not a rational solution, it’s not an emotional solution...

It is a heart solution – one that gets at the place where our thoughts, our feelings, our actions flow out of, the core of our human existence. In Jesus Christ God has freed human nature at its heart from the oppression of Sin.

And how did Christ fight this battle, not politically or militarily – but through dying a criminal’s death on a cross – an amazing victory achieved in such a lowly way, a contrasting way.

As the bible says *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” ( 1 Cor 1:18)*

Friends God is working in our world, he is working in our lives to save us – to save us from the oppression of Sin.

And when our hearts are freed from Sin, we are enabled to give up that desire, that predisposition we all have to determine what is right and wrong for ourselves – that’s the root of our Sin, the root of all our problems - like the book of Judges says *“In those days Israel had no King and each person did what was right in their own eyes”*

But Freedom from Sin means that we give the prerogative to decide what is right and wrong, back to whom it rightfully belongs - we give it back to Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Lord, our King! And we follow and obey him instead of ourselves.

And this has implications, it has economic implications, it has political implications, it has implications for every aspect of our lives and society, and for the entire creation!

Think about William Wilberforce, for whom following Jesus as Savior meant that he campaigned to end the slave trade in the British Empire.

Think about Martin Luther King, for whom following Jesus as Lord meant fighting for civil rights for African Americans in United States,

and think about Tommy Douglas, for whom following Jesus as King meant working to establishing a healthcare system in Canada so basic healthcare was available to everyone.

Friends once we are no longer comfortable with Sin in our hearts, we can no longer be comfortable with the ways that Sin oppresses others and manifests itself in things like human trafficking, corruption on Wall St, environmental destruction and so on...

And if we're motivated to rise up and do something about it – don't go and occupy downtown Calgary, protesting isn't the solution; evangelism is!

We need to share the good news, the truth of how Christ can free each of us from the Sin that is lodged in our hearts.

Because when Christ is King in the hearts of CEO's they make business decisions that steward the environment not ravage it, and when Christ is King over the lives of stockbrokers and investors they make ethical investments to share the wealth not hoard it for themselves or rip people off... when Christ is King in people's lives... things get better! You get the picture.

So yes, if we made Samson into a movie – I think it would be more than just another action flick.

It would be a call for us to wake up and stop being so comfortable with the way in which Sin oppresses us.

It would be a call to take advantage of what God has done in Christ so that you and I can be free,

And it would inspire us to go out and make a difference in this world by sharing with other people how they can be freed as well.

So friends what are we waiting for...we can live this story friends, we don't need to wait for the movie. Amen.